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ABSTRACT

The centric model of career counseling was developed for use in employment counseling and takes into account psychological, social, and economic factors. Four developmental phases are used to describe movement within the centric model. The initial phase, readiness, establishes the working alliance between the counselor and the client. Clients must feel acknowledged, respected, and valued. In the next phase, career exploration and assessment, the focus is on the personal and the external. Personal factors include interests, values, and strengths. Clients are encouraged to develop information on the various personal factors through qualitative and quantitative assessments. Following exploration and assessment is the third phase, evaluation, compromise, and integration. There is a need to draw the information together and evaluate the viability of various options. Compromises may be necessary, which may then facilitate a new integration. Finally, in the last phase of commitment, action planning, and follow through, clients are ready to move forward with their plans. Counselors can facilitate movement through the phases by using a combination of good communication skills and structured activities. Skills such as paraphrasing, clarifying, and empathy are especially helpful in the initial phases. Progress involves back and forth movement through the phases and the use of various structured activities within a humanistic context. (RJM)

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by Norm Amundson

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON Counseling And Student Services

ERIC DIGEST

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A Centric Career Counseling Model

Norm Amundson

Overview

The centric model of career counseling was developed for use in employment counseling (Amundson, 1987; 1989). This approach takes into account psychological, social, and economic factors; work is viewed as one part of a total life-style.

Discussion

Four developmental phases are used to describe movement within the centric model. Although these phases usually develop in a sequential fashion, counselors should expect considerable back and forth movement.

Readiness (Establishing the Working Alliance)

The initial relationship between counselor and client is critical and sets the foundation for further counseling (Gelso & Carter, 1985). Counselors need to create a "mattering" climate where the client feels acknowledged, respected, and valued (Amundson, 1993). Creating this type of climate requires attention to both physical environment and interpersonal dynamics.

Within the positive relationship there is the need to assess readiness with respect to expectations, the fulfillment of basic needs, and self-esteem. For many clients there is little point in proceeding to the second phase until some basic issues are resolved. Many unemployed clients, for example, need to normalize their experiences with unemployment before beginning any form of assessment. Also, some clients have misperceptions about the nature of career counseling and should discuss the process with their counselors prior to engaging in further activities. Whatever the issue, counselors must pay particular attention to pacing and only move forward once readiness has been attained.

Career Exploration and Assessment

Here the focus is on two different domains: the personal and the external. The personal factors include interests, values, strengths (skills), limitations, and personal style. Clients are encouraged to develop information on the various personal factors through qualitative and quantitative assessments. The information can come from a consideration of each area separately, or in a more comprehensive fashion through the exploration of experiences.

The external domain includes significant others, work/leisure experiences, educational background, and labor market options. Obtaining information in these areas requires research, contact with others, and careful consideration of past experiences.

Figure 1 illustrate the above relationdships.

While each of the factors are of equal size in the diagram, the dotted lines indicate that the perceived importance of the various personal or external factors can vary considerably. For some clients the role of significant others is paramount; for others, it is of minimal interest. Assessing the relative importance of the various factors can provide interesting insights.

Evaluation, Compromise, and Integration

Following exploration and assessment, there is a need to draw the information together and evaluate the viability of various options. Compromises may be necessary, which may facilitate a new integration. It is important in this phase that clients recognize the uncertainty associated with career choice (Gelatt, 1989). Some common myths which may need to be addressed are as follows:

- Once you make a career choice you are committed for life.

- The choice you make should be totally fulfilling.
- If you choose correctly you will be guaranteed a successful future.

Commitment, Action Planning, And Follow Through

This last phase is based on the assumption that clients are ready to move forward with their plans. They are willing to make a commitment to the process and then select and pursue a few basic issues. To assist this process, Walter & Peller (1992) use the following criteria in goal setting: (a) be positive; (b) use action verbs (ending with "ing"); (c) focus on the present; (d) be specific and think through the details; (e) consider only goals which are within the client's control; and (f) use the client's language.

As clients move forward with their goals and overall action plans, there will be consequences. A need then arises for follow-up to check the viability of plans and to maintain client motivation. This final step leaves room for "fine tuning" and is critically important to long term counseling effectiveness.

The Counseling Dynamics

Counselors can facilitate movement through the phases that are described above by using a combination of good communication skills and structured activities. Skills such as paraphrasing, clarifying, empathy, information giving, open-ended questioning, and summarizing are helpful in the initial phases. There is also a role for reframing and for constructive critical reflection. Thus, skills such as immediacy; self disclosure; advanced, accurate empathy; supporting; limiting; and confrontation (strength-challenge, in most instances) can be helpful.

One of the structured activities which has been associated with this model focuses on the initial discussion of the counseling process. Figure 1 is used to facilitate discussion by illustrating the factors included in the personal and external domains (Amundson & Poehnell, 1993). Figure 1 also serves to summarize information that is gathered during the exploration and assessment phase.

A wide variety of other structured activities can be applied to both information gathering and reframing (Goldman, 1992). The strategies focus on different time orientations and facilitate the development of new perspectives. Activities which focus on the past address normalization and the careful scrutiny of past accomplishments. Within a present-time focus there is the emphasis upon positive affirmation, limiting negative thinking, externalizing the problem, decision making, and information giving. In terms of the future, there is a focus on hypothetical solutions, behavior rehearsal, focusing, and new cycles of activity. All of these activities involve the client in a structured sequence of events which lead to greater personal awareness.

Movement through the various phases is not always sequential; what is occuring throughout is movement from expansion to contraction and then to further expansion. The need for expansion at the action planning phase is often overlooked because of the need for closure. While it can be comforting for clients and counselors to develop one plan of action, in today's labor market more options and greater flexibility are necessary.

Conclusion

The centric career counseling model uses four developmental phases to describe the counseling process. Progress involves back and forth movement through the phases and the use of various structured activities within a humanistic counseling context. Expansion is needed at the exploration and assessment phase; contraction occurs as people evaluate and commit to options; and further expansion and flexibility become necessary as these options are imbedded within a fast-changing labor market.

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